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Commission on religious freedom would have found violence-torn Orissa far from normal.

NEW DELHI, June 29 (Compass Direct News) – The Indian government is silent on why it refused visas to allow members of the **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** to visit troubled Orissa state, but there are indications that it was ducking protests from Hindu nationalist groups.

The **USCIRF** team was to leave for India on June 12, but the Indian embassy in Washington did not give them visas in time, the religious panel said in a June 17 statement.

“Our Commission has visited China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and over 20 other countries,” **Commission Chair Felice D. Gaer said in the statement.**

“India, a close ally of the United States, has been unique among democracies in delaying and denying USCIRF’s ability to visit. USCIRF has been requesting visits since 2001.”

The team was to discuss religious freedom with officials of the new government, which began its second five-year term on May 22, as well as with religious leaders, civil society activists and others in the wake of anti-Christian attacks in Kandhamal district of the eastern state of Orissa in December 2007 and August-September 2008.